

## TEXAS TRANSFER FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

**Background.** Under the leadership of Commissioner Harrison Keller, substantially improving transfer, particularly for students attending community colleges who plan to transfer to a public four-year university, is a central priority for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. State policy mechanisms available for the agency and institutions to improve transfer were strengthened during the 86<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session (2019) with the passage of Senate Bill 25. Senate Bill 25 included several important provisions to improve transfer in Texas, including recommended course sequences, earlier filing of degree plans, and new reporting on nontransferable credit. To build upon the momentum created by Senate Bill 25, earlier this year the Coordinating Board convened a small, informal workgroup – the Improving Texas Transfer Workgroup – which was comprised of an equal number of representatives from public two- and four- year institutions.

Workgroup members met regularly since April 23 to study and make recommendations to improve vertical transfer and the applicability of credit in Texas’ public higher education institutions. The workgroup’s aims were to work collaboratively to develop recommendations that would: (1) substantially improve vertical transfer; (2) substantially improve the applicability of credit to a major; and (3) reduce excess semester credit hours. The Improving Texas Transfer Workgroup examined several other states’ approaches to vertical transfer and closely reviewed existing Texas transfer resources – such as the Texas Core Curriculum, Field of Study Curricula, and the Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM), among others – to develop ideas and recommendations to make vertical transfer more transparent and student-friendly.

**Continuity and change with existing transfer policy.** The Texas Transfer Framework will build upon the strengths of existing Texas transfer policy, while introducing new policies and procedures that will substantially improve transfer. In implementing all aspects of this new transfer framework, the Coordinating Board is committed to working in close consultation with institutions.

The Texas Transfer Framework is intended to complement and bolster transfer pathways and cross-institutional partnerships that are student-centric and flexible for students and institutions, particularly through regional collaborations that effectively streamline students’ most common transfer pathways. The proposed implementation rollout will also protect current students who are pursuing existing Field of Study Curricula, while providing paths for current and future students to take advantage of the Texas Transfer Framework.

**Actions to implement the Texas Transfer Framework.** Some elements of the transfer framework will require formal amendment of rules, a process Coordinating Board staff will pursue in consultation with institutions of higher education. However, realizing the benefits of the transfer framework will require consistent adoption through institutional practice, particularly in student advising. The Coordinating Board will work closely with institutions to ensure students and college and career advisers across the state, from secondary schools through institutions of higher education, have access to well-designed advising resources about the Texas Transfer Framework. Community colleges, public universities, and school districts across Texas will all be critical partners in adopting and implementing the recommendations of the workgroup to ensure seamless and transparent transfer for the benefit of students.

# Improving Transfer in Texas Workgroup Recommendations

## Design Principles

The workgroup began by establishing design principles to provide guidance in discussions and a framework for developing recommendations.

**Principle 1 (Shared Responsibility):** Both community colleges and universities share equal responsibility for an efficient transfer framework.

**Principle 2 (Transparency/Student-Centric Academic Pathways):** The transfer framework must be seamless and transparent for students.

**Principle 3 (Optimizing Courses Applying Upon Transfer):** The transfer framework must optimize the number of courses/credits applicable to the major upon transfer to a university.

**Principle 4 (Process):** The transfer framework shall be developed through a transparent process that involves all institutions participating in a formal venue to identify and to endorse mechanisms for efficient transfer.

**Principle 5 (Full-Scale Implementation):** The mechanisms of the transfer framework must be adhered to by all institutions. A formal venue will be sustained for post-implementation oversight.

## TEXAS TRANSFER FRAMEWORK

The basic Texas Transfer Framework consists of 60 SCH of lower-division courses that a student would complete to earn an associate degree for transfer. This framework aims to optimize the course selections made by students, with the intent that students who complete 60 semester credit hours (SCH) will transfer to a university with junior standing in the major, and that as many courses as possible will apply to a degree program.



### ***The Texas Core Curriculum (TCC)***

The TCC currently consists of 42 SCH organized in 9 component areas in broad disciplinary areas. The workgroup recommends identifying courses in each component area that would both satisfy the student's Texas Core Curriculum requirement and would also apply to the student's major program of study upon transfer. Specific courses identified within the Government, Communication, and American History component areas will be accepted and applied to the program of study at the receiving institution. Each of the other component areas, including the remaining 3 SCH of the Communication component area, that are relevant to a specific discipline would be reviewed by a committee to identify the courses that will fulfill the TCC and provide a clear pathway to the major.

### ***Discipline Foundation Courses (DFC)***

The Discipline Foundation Courses (DFC) would be comprised of up to 12 SCH major-specific courses prescribed for students. Credit completed in a DFC will apply upon transfer to any public university in the state that offers a corresponding major or track within a major and will be transcribed by the sending institutions as completing a requirement in the DFC. All DFC courses must be cross-listed using the TCCNS number, especially in student-facing materials. Only courses in the ACGM would be eligible for inclusion. Courses typically taught at the upper division at universities should not be included in a DFC. A course should only be included in a DFC if a critical number of community colleges have the capacity to offer the course.

The Texas Transfer Advisory Committee (see below) will ensure each DFC is comprehensively reviewed no less than every 5 years and may be reviewed earlier, including upon institutional request (for example, in the case of accreditation changes). The review will include evaluation of data related to student completion of the DFC, applicability of transferred courses to the major of the DFC following transfer, and student success in subsequent courses and in completing majors.

### ***Directed Electives***

Each discipline-specific transfer framework will include at least 6 SCH of courses that address the individual student's interests and needs. Students will select courses used to fulfill this requirement based on the student's academic interest, university of interest, and the curriculum recommendations of the sending and receiving institutions. Only courses in the ACGM would be eligible for inclusion. Where necessary, a receiving institution may identify and submit to THECB a set of specific directed elective courses that are either recommended or required by that institution to ensure students' success in subsequent courses. Any courses identified by individual institutions for use toward this requirement must be cross-listed using the TCCNS number, especially in all student-facing materials, and reported to THECB.

Prospective transfer students will be supplied with appropriate advising materials to make choices to maximize the likelihood of courses in this category transferring to a degree program and applying to a major based on their transfer preferences. THECB will develop and maintain a website where students, advisers, and faculty across the state will be able to view and compare institutions' transfer pathways, along with institutions' recommended sequences of courses for the certificate and degree programs they offer.

## **GOVERNANCE**

The ***Texas Transfer Advisory Committee (TTAC)*** will be responsible for overseeing and ensuring consistent review of all parts of the Texas Transfer Frameworks (including the TCC, the DFC, and the Directed Electives), and sharing information. In addition, TTAC will review relevant data, coordinate the schedule of discipline-specific reviews, recommend DFCs to the Commissioner, and propose changes when institutions indicate that an aspect of the framework is not working. The TTAC will work under the design principles that were developed by the Improving Transfer in Texas workgroup.

The TTAC will consist of faculty and administrators from public institutions, with equal representation from community colleges and universities, as well as student and academic advisor ex-officio representatives. The TTAC will review data provided by the Coordinating Board that identifies the most frequent transfer major, disciplines with the most lost credits, and state priorities when determining which disciplinary areas should be considered for development. The TTAC will also ensure alignment of the TCC with the Texas Transfer Framework to optimize the transferability and applicability of credits and increase transfer students' success within majors. The TTAC will convene the Discipline-Specific Subcommittees on a regular basis and determine whether to adopt recommendations from the various subcommittees.

Adoption of recommendations by the TTAC require that a supermajority of each constituency on the committee (university and community college) agree to recommend the DFC to the Commissioner, who has sole discretion to make the final decision to adopt or reject the proposed curriculum. A DFC recommended by the TTAC to the Commissioner will be routed by THECB to all institutions for at least 30 days for review and comment prior to final agency action. At least annually, TTAC will report to the THECB actions recommended over the previous year by the Discipline-Specific Subcommittees, the status of operating subcommittees, and other recommendations as appropriate to improve student transfer and success across the state.

The ***Discipline-Specific Subcommittees*** will consist of subject-matter experts in each disciplinary area from Texas public higher education institutions, with equal representation from community colleges and universities. These subcommittees will iterate and revise curricula, establish course sequences in the TCC and the DFC that will seamlessly transfer and apply to the program of study in all institutions across the state, and identify course recommendations for the Directive Electives. The established course sequences will be recommended to TTAC.

### **Dispute Resolution**

If two institutions have a dispute over the applicability of a course within the Texas Transfer Framework, they should try to work through the difference to come to a resolution that will increase the likelihood of students' success in subsequent courses and in their majors. If no resolution is possible, then the dispute will be elevated to the Commissioner for a final determination.

### **Petitions for Additional DFC**

One of the key principles guiding the design of the Texas Transfer Framework is that the framework's mechanisms must be transparent to students and adhered to by all institutions. The workgroup also recognizes that to improve transfer and support student success, there should be flexibility within the framework to address students' interests and needs.

After providing written notice and rationale to the TTAC and the Commissioner, an institution's CAO may petition for an additional DFC to be established for a specific major or track within a major. These institutional petitions shall be considered by the TTAC. A recommendation concerning adoption of the alternative DFC will be presented to the Commissioner including a report and recorded votes by sector. The Commissioner will consider the TTAC report in making a final decision and then inform the Board at the next quarterly meeting. THECB will develop and maintain a public website that lists all institutions – and related rationale – with approved additional DFC for majors or tracks within majors. The ability to petition for an alternative DFC is necessary because an institution may determine that their unique curriculum in a specific discipline does not align with the approved DFC. Petitioning for an alternative DFC should be a *rare occurrence*, as defined by the TTAC and in consideration of optimizing student transfer.